



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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A STATEMENT ON PERSECUTION OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY IN GREECE

Introduction

Since 1965 in the United States, we the "Orthodox and Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation," and official group of churchmen, university and seminary professors, have been investigating matters of mutual concern between Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. The participants of this Consultation have been officially designated by the representative ecclesiastical authorities.

At our most recent consultation which took place in New York City, January 24-25, 1978, this statement of concern was drafted, in the first place, by the Roman Catholic participants. They propose to submit to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States, with the request that the Conference consider it as a matter of grave significance and take appropriate action. The Orthodox participants in the Consultation unanimously concur in the positions taken below. The statement is issued therefore as a formal statement of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation.

A Statement of Concern:

In recent months the Turkish government has taken a series of injurious actions against the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey. This Consultation is deeply concerned about this grave situation that violates even the most basic human rights. The history of restrictive measures and outright persecutions by the Turkish officials against the Greek Orthodox minority community, reflected in recent years by the closing of the historic Theological School of Halki, is already well known. However, in more recent times, further discriminatory measures have been imposed by Turkish authorities which limit the leaders of the Greek Orthodox community in the exercise of their legitimate religious rights. For example, millions of liras in taxes have been imposed by Turkish authorities upon the schools and churches of the Greek Orthodox community in Istanbul. At the same time, the Turkish government has refused to issue passports and permits for certain hierarchs and many Turkish citizens of Greek descent to travel abroad. By such actions Turkish officials have seriously interfered with the exercise of the worldwide religious responsibilities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

These violations of human rights and religious freedom are in themselves reasons for protest. In addition, we, the members of this Consultation wish to underline the historic significance of the Orthodox See of Constantinople in its present geographical situation for witnessing to the continuity of the Christian Church. The oppression of the Greek Orthodox in Turkey and the threat to the very existence there of the Ecumenical Patriarchate are all the more serious in this period when the cause of religious unity and world peace has been fostered by the growing relationships between the Ecumenical Patriarch and all the Orthodox Churches with the late Pope John XXIII, His Holiness Pope Paul VI and with Christians everywhere.

We express our shock and outrage at these actions and we dedicate ourselves in fraternal concern to continued protests against these measures.

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New York, NY

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